

IRS warns of scams targeting stimulus payments

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The IRS is warning people nationwide to beware of scammers trying to steal COVID-19 economic impact payments.

The stimulus checks will be distributed in a matter of weeks. Most recipients will receive the payment through direct deposit into their bank accounts. People who don't have bank accounts, the elderly and others who have traditionally received paper-check tax refunds will receive the payments the same way.

Scammers are particularly targeting the latter groups, but everyone should be on the lookout for several schemes. The most common involve scammers trying to get people to sign over checks to them and "verify" filing

information, which they'll use to file false tax returns, according to the IRS.

Officials have identified three ways scammers may try to carry out the thefts.

First, taxpayers should be extra vigilant for unsolicited phone calls concerning their economic impact payments, said Tom Murdock, assistant special agent in charge with the IRS Criminal Investigations Seattle Field Office.

"These phone impersonation scams can be coming from anywhere, from out of the county," Murdock said. "They're bogus; people should hang up."

These scams are similar to someone purportedly calling from the sheriff's office or police department, claiming you owe money. For the stimulus payments, scammers will

more likely claim to be working for the IRS.

"An aggressive and sophisticated phone scam targeting taxpayers, including recent immigrants, have been making the rounds throughout the country. Callers claim to be employees of the IRS but are not. Victims are told they owe money to the IRS, and it must be paid promptly through a pre-loaded debit card or wire transfer. If the victim refuses to cooperate, they are then threatened with arrest, deportation or suspension of a business or driver's license," according to the IRS.

Second, people should be on the lookout for emails and texts from individuals purporting to be IRS workers. The messages may ask for information to get your money or speed up the stimulus payment, Murdock said.

Scam emails are designed to trick taxpayers into thinking they are official communications from the IRS, tax industry professionals or tax software companies.